

Don't Throw That Stone!

The ancient Hebrews had what appear to us to be particularly cruel methods of putting criminals to death. Four forms of capital punishment were used: stoning, burning, beheading, and strangling. The Bible abounds with descriptions of stonings. There was a legal procedure for putting offenders to death in this manner. Two witnesses took a stand on an elevation of about twice the height of a man. The convict then was laid on his back beneath them. One of the witnesses would drop a large stone upon the victim's heart. If this did not crush the life out of his body the second witness would cast a stone. If he still survived then the people of Israel were invited to indulge themselves in a storm of stone-throwing until he was dead. Stoning was thus used as a regular means of execution because it tended to avoid the shedding of blood.

The ~~XXXXXXXXXX~~ New Testament is filled with the sounds of viciously thrown stones whirring through the air and the dull, sickening thud of human bodies smashed and falling. Jesus faced hostile crowds armed with stones. Stephen, the first martyr, lay dying in the dirt as an angry mob pounded the life out of him with heavy rocks. Paul and Peter and the other disciples were often showered by stones.

Is this a custom which belongs exclusively to a benighted past? Indeed not, for men always have and still do throw stones. You may think that you don't but you do. It might be difficult for you to remember just how many stones you have hurled during this past week. You may have in your hand at the moment stones which you will be inclined to throw before the sun sets on this day. Let us name some of the stones we throw.

-I-

There is for one the stone of anger. Just as stone throwing served as a vent for the pent up angers of people in the days of Christ so too it serves as an outlet for our uncontrollable feelings.

There is in most of us a wild, infantile streak of sheer violence. When we become displeased, or when our passions and temper become inflamed, we return to the quite infantile tendency <sup>of</sup> to throw <sup>ing</sup> things. So it is quite natural that we lash out against someone in hot anger. All of us have seen children who throw things when they get mad.



All of us have seen childish adults who throw and kick things when they are angered.

It is all the better for our infantile expressions when some incident pursued by a mob gives us the chance to merge our malicious feelings in a group frenzy. I remember several years ago when a communist organizer came to Columbus to begin his work for the party. Immediately there arose against him the uncontrollable wrath of a mob. A Columbus newspaper had printed a picture of the house into which he had moved. One night, not long after, a mob of some 300 persons swarmed down upon that house and vented their fanatical fury with clubs and bricks and rocks. When the fires of their insane passions had burned out the house, ~~both~~ inside and out, was a complete wreck. Probably if anyone of that mob had been asked to give a ~~xxxx~~ well reasoned and articulated account of the thing he was attacking he would have been rendered speechless and helpless. For this was not an attack against a known enemy, Communism; rather it was the work of weak minds and infantile characters who simply would be incapable of standing up to fight with their minds. And actually they were people who seized upon this occasion as an opportunity to vent~~ed~~ their boiling anger which might otherwise have scalded their wives and children. They had no more idea of why they were sacking a house than many of the ancient mobs had for stoning Christian martyrs.

I know a man who goes about his community deliberately throwing stones of condemnation and poison against a certain doctor because he was one time angered to the very tips of his toes when this doctor made a perfectly reasonable charge for a service for which this unreasonable man had no intention of paying. So with great fanfare ~~he~~ goes about stoning the doctor in the hope that he can bring <sup>to</sup> ~~to~~ him irreparable damage.

This is the raw human stuff out of which wars are made. It is the reason our world now is so perilously close again to total war. Wars are the very denial of reason and cool-mindedness; they rather reflect the infantile tendency of the human race to throw stones - and bombs and fire jelly - when the human mind is crazed ~~with~~ anger. Actually we are reverting to the original type of the human race. Albert Einstein recently declared: "I do not know what weapons will be used in World War III. But I do know what will be used in World War IV - stone clubs." (INT. BIBLE, v.7, p.888) Then we will have turned the full circle of human depravity which is well expressed in the throwing of stones, literal or



verbal.

So stop for a moment. Can't you find a better way to express your wrath?  
Don't throw that stone!

-II-

Another stone we commonly throw is the stone of gossip. This can be quite as effective and brutal, though not so physical, as the ancient custom of stone-throwing.

Benjamin Franklin once said of a certain woman: "Mary's mouth costs her nothing, for she never opens it but at others expense." Actual throwing of physical stones might be preferable to the slings of ~~idla~~ slander and gossip.

A psychologist, K Ligon, has written that "It is a correct insight into human nature to judge a man as he judges his neighbor adversely." (PSYCH. OF CHRIST. PERSONALITY, p. 301) Gossipers wear their inner history on their ~~ix~~ outside.

There are two women I know whose tongues are veritable slings for poisonous slander. A kindly neighbor once said that she was sick of hearing everyone in town defamed and denounced. They had no good word for anyone. They had bad words for everyone. They have made a profession out of throwing stones at other people. But their stone-throwing is simply the outer revelation of inner abscesses on the soul. Their stones are hurled up out of the wretched misery and mutilations of their inner lives.

A certain church sponsored a refugee mother and her daughter. Several months after they had arrived it was learned that the mother would have a baby. Kind hands and loving hearts surrounded her with the depth of Christian love. Because of her circumstances it seemed best that she give the child up for adoption. This she did only with inward pain. But there was one woman who spoke savagely about her. She said: "I hope she suffers for that." What the stone-throwing woman did not know was that this woman had suffered ~~thought~~ the unspeakable horrors of being driven from her home, of seeing her husband torn from her arms and taken away to die, of enduring ~~xxxxix~~ with a little daughter for six years the deprivations and degradations of a D.P. camp. Stones thrown like that may some day come back to find their mark.

To talk idly, uncharitably, viciously about people is to return to the ancient and barbaric custom of throwing stones. Don't throw that stone which may be an ~~idla~~ word, an utterance of injury!



-III-

There is a third stone which might be called the stone of self-righteousness. It is an ugly fact that church people are far too prone to throw this stone.

None of us should be self-righteous in his faith. There are in all of us, even the best of us, hidden caverns of guilt and darkness. If we want to be true to our faith we ought to remember the charitableness of Jesus in dealing with sinners and the scorned of men.

The recently concluded political campaign ~~xxxxxxxx~~ churned up the usual religious demagoguery and hypocrisy. There were inordinate and insincere appeals to religious prejudice. It was particularly disturbing to note the ~~xxxxxxxxxxxx~~ slick religious appeals made by people who are religiously indifferent to those who are also religiously indifferent. For the moment it was made to be a crime if a man ~~xxxxx~~ did not embrace any particular religion or belong to any church. But this appeal was made by people and to people who really don't care much about vital religion or real churches. At one point Sen. McCarthy held up for public, televised flogging one of our most eminent historians who had written an article in which he declared that the wrong kind of religion had created much havoc and caused much suffering in the world. That was a statement of literal fact. But the politician wrenched it out of its context to make it appear that the opposition was diseased by atheistic people who were trying to destroy the citadels of religion. It happened that when I heard that I recalled at once that I had read the article from which the senator was quoting and I knew the context. At another time a man, citing himself as an atheist, wrote a letter to the Christian Century applauding Mr. Eisenhower for not belonging to any church. This, he declared, was definitely a fact in his favor and one which led an organization of atheists to greatly desire to endorse Eisenhower officially. But they refrained because they knew, he said, that stupid religious people would use it against him. And stupid people, both religious and non-religious would. But who among them really cares about real religion? Yet their sense of self-righteousness was being appealed to, so it was quite natural to take up the cudgel and the stone to throw.

In recent years there have been many self-appointed, and self-righteous vigilantes who have been riding high on all of those who they consider to be unpatriotic and disloyal. The ~~subject~~ trouble with them is twofold: they are ~~lack~~ insufferably self-righteous and their methods are un-American. In a remarkable book, THE LOYALTY OF FREE MEN, Alan Barth, an outstanding editorial writer for the Washington Post, has analyzed their methods. He calls attention to the fact that many people have been punished lately by publicity. The House Committee on Un-American Activities once announced that its purpose was "The task of protecting our constitutional democracy by . . . pitiless publicity." (p.55) Then he goes on to deal with the technique of character assassination.

One way in which a foreign power might seek to cripple the American atomic energy program would be to single out a few of the country's foremost nuclear physicists - there are not too many - and dispose of them by assassination . . . These men carry in their minds secrets - and the skill to discover new secrets - more valuable than any that could possibly be uncovered by espionage.

But murder is a messy, awkward business. The assassins might be caught and executed; the plot might be discerned before it could be completed. Moreover, it is quite unnecessary. How much more simply the same results can be achieved by a few words craftily spoken before some legislative committee or whispered anonymously to an FBI investigator! Character assassination is at once easier and surer than physical assault; and it involves far less risk for the assassin. It leaves him free to commit the same deed over and over again, and may, indeed, win him the honors of a hero even in the country of his victims. (201-202)

Also it might be added that such fervent patriotism serves as a most secure cloak for self-righteousness. By pelting other people and impugning their motives it is possible to plough under one's own guilt.

Just yesterday I heard of a man over the radio who had pumped the contents of a gun into a crowd, killing one man and injuring others. Later he stated that he had always wanted to shoot himself, but that he didn't quite have the courage to do that. It is always easier for a self-righteous person to throw stones at someone else than it is for him to search his own conscience relentlessly.

Above all else a Christian Church ought to be a haven of blessing and acceptance for all persons, regardless of the nature or extent of their sin. Certainly no one coming into our midst should be greeted with stones for sins which may have marred his life. All of us ought to have the humility and genuine depth of convictions to say prayerfully, "There but for the grace of God go I."



Do you remember the woman who was dragged into the presence of Jesus by a surly crowd which was prepared to stone her as the law of Moses prescribed? She ~~had been~~ <sup>was</sup> known to be an adulteress. They wanted to test Jesus to see if he would uphold the law. As the woman knelt before him, cowering in the dust, he looked the crowd straight in the eye and asked: "Let him who is without sin among you ~~next~~ be the first to throw a stone at her." That seemed to wither the wrath of the crowd as it exposed their own self-righteousness, and they quietly left the scene. By the way, where do you suppose ~~xxxx~~ the guilty man was, and why was he not also to be stoned? It is possible that many of her accusers were adulterers themselves, but now they raised stones against her. Recall also how with infinite pity and tenderness Jesus looked down at the woman at his feet and said to her, "Woman, where are they? Has no one condemned you?" She said, "No one, Lord." And Jesus said, "Neither do I condemn you; go, and not sin again." (John 8:7)

Don't throw that stone at anyone who has sinned or fallen short, for it might well be that you have greater need for forgiveness than they.

-IV-

Finally there is the stone of blindness. This is the stone we throw when we have failed to discern the truth, even ~~the~~ though the truth is clothed in flesh and walks among us. It is what Jesus referred to as he sat in sad contemplation observing the ancient city of Jerusalem: "O Jerusalem, Jerusalem, killing the prophets and stoning those who are sent to you! How often would I have gathered your children together as a hen gathers her brood under her wings, and you would not! Behold, your house is forsaken and desolate. For I tell you, you will not see me again, until you say, 'Blessed be he who comes in the name of the Lord.'" (Matt. 23:37-39)

There is a deep blindness in us when we stone the very ones whom God has sent to save us. In the gospel of John Jesus confronts a crowd armed with stones: "I have shown you many good ~~things~~ works from the Father: for which of these do you stone me?"

"Killing the prophets and stoning those who are sent to you" may be done in different and quite subtle ways. To be cruel and severe it need not be physically brutal. Yet you do violence to Christ when you ignore him in your indifference. By your inaction and your neglect of spiritual duties you stone him into near defeat. You stone the spirit of Christ when you show your children and the young people around you that you really don't <sup>can</sup>.



How often we reject those whom God has sent to us! There is a church not far from here which expelled its minister during the late war because his son declared him as a conscientious objector to war and because this minister spoke too bravely and clearly on delicate social issues. This minister is truly one of God's elect, he and his entire family. He is one of the most respected leaders of our church. But that church gave evidence of still "killing the prophets and stoning" those who were sent unto it.

The great missionary doctor in the jungles of Africa, Albert Schweitzer, wrote in his great autobiography that "Anyone who proposes to do good must not expect people to roll stones out of his way, but must accept his lot calmly if they even roll a few more upon it. A strength which becomes clearer and stronger through its experience of such obstacles is the only strength that can conquer them. Resistance is only a waste of strength." (OUT OF MY LIFE AND THOUGHT, p. 92) Really great people expect to dodge all sorts of stones and mount over all manner of obstacles thrown upon their way. But think of being one who thus makes it hard for God's saints! Are you certain that you are not one making it difficult for God's truth to be spoken and His love to be acted? Are you one who kills the prophets and stones those who God sends? Would you have been one to stone Jesus?

Would you not rather be one who prevents the stonings of God's great acts? This week I have been reading a book in which I met a man of tremendous courage and saintliness. In Omaha, Nebraska there was a meeting one night of the Urban League. ~~There was a meeting~~ ~~of the Urban League~~ ~~in Omaha, Nebraska~~ A Roman Catholic priest sat silent as he heard someone tell of a dark-skinned family which had been stoned by youngsters as it inspected a home it was about to buy in a certain neighborhood. Those in the meeting were greatly concerned about what would happen on the day the family arrived with its furniture. An officer asked the group what it might do. "I know what to do," said the priest, who then told the group that that particular neighborhood was predominately Catholic. "What time are they moving in?" he asked. The priest was told the proposed moving-time. He advised the group not to worry. "I know what to do," he repeated. At the appointed time the Negro family arrived with some of their furniture. Older neighbors pulled back curtains to peek. Youngsters eased away from their homes toward the Negroes, ready to hurl stones and insults. But before the first stone was thrown the youngsters saw a frocked gentleman walk off the porch of the home that the Negroes had bought. It was their

priest, who made himself an unofficial, one-man welcoming committee. He shook hands with the Negro man and helped him carry the first piece of furniture into the house. Youngsters dropped their rocks in shame and turned ~~away~~ toward their homes for advice from parents, who obviously had encouraged the first stoning. But peeking faces disappeared in sudden embarrassment. A Negro family had found a new home outside the blight and rubble that had been marked "for Negroes only." A few weeks later they also had some new friends - among the very neighbors who had expressed such great unhappiness at seeing them buy the house." (SOUTH OF FREEDOM, Carl T. Rowan, p.265-67)

I want to conclude this sermon with an expression of deep gratitude to someone I do not even know. This week a letter came to me from someone who did not care to sign his name. He stated that he had seen my sermon topic and that he had jotted down a few lines which he was enclosing. It is evident that these words have grown up out of a deep experience:

Don't throw that stone

No, Don't throw that stone.

It may strike and injure

A mother's loved one.

A son or a daughter,

Husband, wife or a friend;

Someone who has stumbled

And needs you, to lend

Your prayers, your help

In their desperate need;

If only you'll think,

And thinking, take heed

Place yourself in their place

With their weakness and cares;

Your stone will be dropped

And you'll kneel there in prayer.

Jesus says, "Let the one

Without sin cast the stone;

So, brother or sister

Are you the right one?